

## Amendment 37 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 37)

### *Frequently Asked Questions* *June 2016*

#### **What is the purpose of Amendment 37?**

Amendment 37 responds to the latest population assessment for hogfish. The assessment identified two populations of hogfish for the South Atlantic Region (managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council) and one population of hogfish for the Gulf of Mexico (managed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council). The two populations of hogfish in the South Atlantic Region were determined to be from Georgia through North Carolina and Florida Keys/East Florida. For the Florida Keys/East Florida population, assessment results showed the population is *undergoing overfishing and is overfished*, and therefore, is in need of a rebuilding plan. The overfishing and overfished status for the Georgia/North Carolina population is unknown.

Alternatives to specify boundaries of the Florida Keys/East Florida population of hogfish from the hogfish population in the Gulf of Mexico included the jurisdictional boundary between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils, Monroe/Collier County line, and a point just south of Cape Sable (Figure 1). Under the current preferred alternative, the Florida Keys/East Florida population of hogfish would be managed from south of Cape Sable, around the Florida Keys, to the Florida/Georgia border. Therefore, hogfish in the entire Florida Keys would be managed exclusively by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

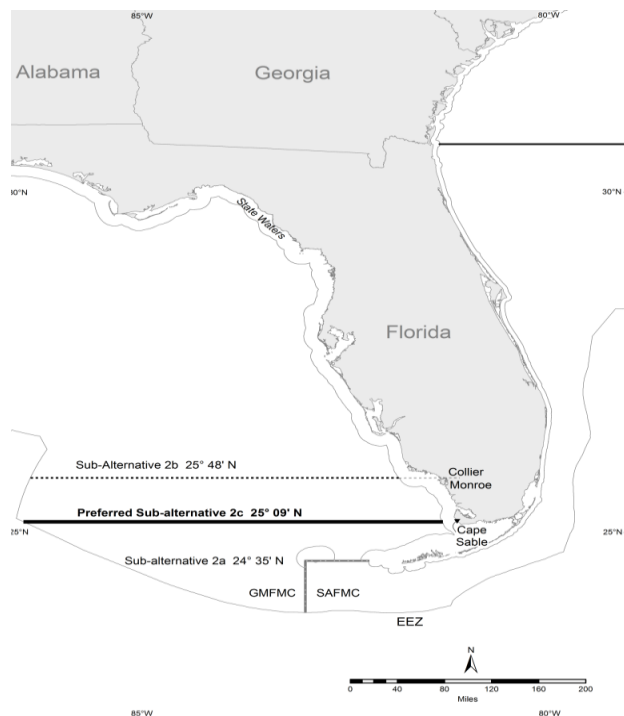


Figure 1. Proposed boundary Sub-alternatives 2a (gray), 2b (dotted) and 2c (**Preferred**) (black) to separate the Florida Keys/East Florida population of hogfish from the Gulf of Mexico population. Source: Amanda Frick, NMFS SERO

**What are the proposed actions in Amendment 37 for the Florida Keys/East Florida population?**

- Establish a rebuilding plan. Alternatives for the timeline to rebuild the FLK/EFL population include seven or 10 years. The current preferred alternative is 10 years.
- Specify annual catch limits that are equal to or below the acceptable biological catch. The current preferred alternative is to set the total 2017 annual catch limit at 17,034 fish (95% of the acceptable biological catch). Employing the existing allocation formula to the total annual catch limit, the commercial annual catch limit would be 3,510 pounds whole weight (1,345 fish) and the recreational annual catch limit would be 15,689 fish.
- Establish recreational annual catch targets below the annual catch limit. The current preferred alternative is to set the 2017 recreational annual catch target at 13,335 fish.
- Increase the commercial and recreational minimum size limits. Alternatives range from 12 to 17 inches fork length. The current preferred alternative is to set the commercial and recreational minimum size limit to 16 inches fork length.
- Establish a commercial trip limit. Alternatives range from no trip limit to 200 pounds whole weight, and the current preferred alternative is 25 pounds whole weight.
- Establish a recreational bag limit. Alternatives range from one fish per vessel to the current measures of 5 fish per person off Florida and no bag limit off other states. The current preferred alternative is one fish per person per day.
- Establish a recreational fishing season. Alternatives range from not specifying a fishing season to a fishing season that includes a combination of months between May and October. The current preferred alternative is July-October.

**What are the proposed actions in Amendment 37 for the Georgia/North Carolina population?**

- Specify annual catch limits that are equal to or below the acceptable biological catch. The current preferred alternative is to set the total 2017 annual catch at 33,930 pounds whole weight (95% of the acceptable biological catch). Employing the existing allocation formula to the total annual catch limit, the commercial annual catch limit would be 23,456 pounds whole weight and the recreational annual catch limit would be 988 fish (10,474 pounds whole weight).
- Establish recreational annual catch targets below the annual catch limit. The current preferred alternative is to set the 2017 recreational annual catch target at 840 fish.
- Increase the commercial and recreational minimum size limit. Alternatives range from 12 to 20 inches fork length, and the preferred alternative is 17 inches fork length.
- Establish a commercial trip limit. Alternatives range from no trip limit to 750 pounds whole weight. The current preferred alternative is to set the commercial trip limit at 500 pounds whole weight.
- Establish a recreational bag limit. Alternatives range from two fish per person per day to the current measures of 5 fish per person off Florida and no bag limit off other states. The current preferred alternative is two fish per person per day.

### **What accountability measures are proposed for the Florida Keys/East Florida and Georgia/North Carolina populations of hogfish?**

- If commercial landings reach or are projected to reach the commercial annual catch limit, the commercial sector would close for the remainder of the fishing year; all sale or purchase would be prohibited, and harvest or possession of hogfish in or from the exclusive economic zone would be limited to the recreational bag and possession limit. If the commercial annual catch limit is exceeded, the commercial annual catch limit in the following fishing year would be reduced by the amount of the commercial overage, only if hogfish is overfished and the total annual catch limit is exceeded.
- If recreational landings reach or are projected to reach the recreational annual catch limit, the recreational sector would close for the remainder of the fishing year, unless NOAA Fisheries determines that a closure is unnecessary. If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, then during the following fishing year, landings would be monitored for a persistence in increased landings. If necessary, the length of fishing season and the recreational annual catch limit would be reduced in the following fishing year by the amount of the recreational overage, only if the species is overfished and the total annual catch limit is exceeded. The length of the recreational season and recreational annual catch limit would not be reduced if NOAA Fisheries determines a reduction is unnecessary.

### **Who would be affected by Amendment 37?**

- Commercial and recreational fishers who fish for snapper-grouper species in federal waters (3-200 miles offshore) off Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina.

### **When might Amendment 37 be effective?**

- If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, regulations could be effective by spring 2017.

### **How can I comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Amendment 37?**

- NOAA Fisheries is accepting comments on the draft environmental impact statement for Amendment 37 from June 17, 2016, to August 1, 2016.
- Comments on Amendment 37 and its draft environmental impact statement can be submitted electronically via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to [www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2016-0068](http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2016-0068), click the “Comment Now!” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments. Written comments can be submitted to the address below.

**Where can I get more information on Amendment 37 and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement?**

- Contact NOAA Fisheries  
*By Mail:* Southeast Regional Office, c/o Nikhil Mehta  
263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505  
*By FAX:* (727) 824-5308  
*By Phone:* (727) 824-5305
- Amendment 37 and its Draft Environmental Impact Statement may be found online at the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Web site at:  
[http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable\\_fisheries/s\\_atl/sg/2014/am37/index.html](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/s_atl/sg/2014/am37/index.html)  
or the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Web site at <http://www.safmc.net>.